

January 29, 2004

Federal Communications Commission:

I urge your Committee to change how you conduct the Localism Taskforce Hearings, in particular the Open Comment Session, to have them be more democratic and truly reflect, "first come, first serve" as your committee stated.

I woke up at three o'clock in the morning and arrived at San Antonio City Council Chambers around four in the morning. I believed that since I was the first person in line to testify, that I would be the first to speak. I arrived early to ensure that my voice would indeed be heard; throughout the morning many people joined the line. I helped Esperanza Peace and Justice Center distribute a sign-up sheet during the day to people in the line so that they could indicate who they were and the time that they arrived. Our idea behind creating a sign-up sheet was to create a democratic way of organizing the line, enabling people in line to keep their spots according to their time of arrival, prevent people from later jumping ahead in line, and so people in line would not have to worry about leaving briefly to use the restroom nearby.

At the hearing, a few people testified they had waited in line for four hours to give their testimonies. I waited in line for thirteen hours. I waited in line for thirteen hours, and I had to wait to testify in the Second Open Comment session after at least fifty people had already spoken. I was then told that I would only have one minute, not two like the previous session speakers were allowed and the amount of time posted in the official agenda, but one minute-half the time.

The truth is, I was not sure when I was inside the hearing that I would even get to testify. Because of the way the Committee defined "first come, first serve", meaning first to the microphone from their seat, or most aggressive and able-bodied individuals as the case really was, everyone rushed and pushed each other to 'line' up. This 'line' completely filled the aisle, and was full of people jostling one another to get a place ahead. I ended up so far behind in line that even knowing there would be a Second Open Comment Session, I was unsure if I would get a chance to speak.

I am not writing because I wanted to be first, but because there was no way that people like myself who were there at four, eight, ten o'clock in the morning should have had our rightful places to testify taken by other people.

Another problem was that the police informed us that NO ONE was allowed to enter the building before 5:15 and we believed them, yet, when I entered the Chambers from the line outside, other people were already seated. How did they know they could enter the building before the line outside? How did they receive this information? How is this democratic or fair? This was also the case with the first person to testify, a disabled man in a wheelchair, and members of the public whose testimonies pertained to the Amber Alert program. It was actually relayed to members of the line-up that the FCC was particularly interested in hearing the testimonies of the Amber

Alert individuals. Was the FCC not interested in hearing the testimonies of other community members? Why would the FCC think that their testimonies would be more important than ours?

I understand that arrangements were made for the hearing impaired to sit in a place where they could understand the proceedings. These arrangements included saving seats in the front rows. These arrangements were not relayed to any of the line-up at any point in time. As well, arrangements for the hearing impaired should not have given these people advanced placement in the line. If the FCC was so concerned about the hearing impaired being able to understand the proceedings, if this is the justification for seating these people in a better position to reach the microphone, then it makes no sense that their translator was seated at the opposite end of the room from the closed captioning, something that was pointed out by a deaf man during his testimony.

It was disappointing to see that the FCC went to so much trouble to accommodate the hearing impaired, but ignored our requests for simultaneous Spanish translation. Being a "Localism Taskforce Hearing" I would think that the FCC might have taken time to notice that San Antonio is a majority Hispanic city. This majority includes many Spanish language speakers—many more people who speak Spanish as their first language than hearing impaired. If the FCC did not expect deaf individuals to lip-read, it does not make sense that the FCC would expect Spanish language speakers to guess what was going on in the proceedings. A woman brought up the point about lack of proper Spanish language accommodations at the beginning of the hearing; she spoke out in Spanish because she could not say so in English. Her request for translation, and the requests of many from San Antonio for the same, was ignored.

I believe that if a sign-up sheet had been distributed and monitored by officials in an organized manner, everyone could have received fair treatment. There would not been the mass scramble to the microphone that occurred in the hearing, but a simple single line called out. Members of the hearing impaired would then have been able to sit in appropriate areas to meet their needs, while people who had been in line all day would have gotten to have the full two minutes they deserved.

As well, San Antonio Police allowed panelists to enter the building early, yet, people whose sole purpose at the hearing was to give a comment during the Open Comment Session were also allowed to walk in with the panelist. The police said that these people were panelist, but when I came into the Chambers, they were seated near the front, by the microphone, and were clearly not panelists. Why was that allowed? Why were their testimonies more important? Why were they given preferential treatment?

I was frustrated and upset at the hearing. I was frustrated because I was afraid my voice would not be heard. I was frustrated because the time allotted for the second session was reduced to half of what we were told. I was frustrated because the people I had stood in line with, chanted with, ate with, played cards with, did homework with, and practiced testimonies with would not have their voices heard in entirety. I am frustrated and angry because we were mistreated.

We were mistreated.

I am twenty-one. Your message as a government organization was not

democratic. Through poor organization, by not relaying information in a timely, accurate, open, or organized manner (such as with the police), and by not respecting the people of San Antonio, you show me that you are less interested in democracy than I am, than my community is.

Prove in Salinas/Santa Cruz that the Federal Communication Commission believes in democracy.

Organize.

Promote.

Democratize.

I am not challenging the FCC to do a better job in terms of these hearings, I am telling you as a United States Citizen that you must.

Kristin Gorsline

Buena Gente for the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center and citizen of San Antonio